

Food for Thought

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Water Cooperation: Does it exit in Malaysia?

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COMMENT IN CONJUNCTION WITH WORLD WATER DAY 2013 - 20th MARCH 2013 (WEDNESDAY)

WATER COOPERATION: DOES IT EXIST IN MALAYSIA?

World Water Day is celebrated every 22nd March. It is to mark the importance of water in our survival which is part of Decade for Water (2005 - 2015) activity by United Nations. This year the theme of the celebration is 'Water Cooperation' and resembles the importance of cooperation in using water resources for human survival. This year has also been named as International Year of Water Cooperation by UN Water.

While international community focuses cooperation between nations and boundaries, Association of Water and Energy Research Malaysia (AWER) would like to highlight few Paradigm Shifts in dealing with Water Cooperation in Malaysian perspective.

Do Man and Nature cooperate for Water Usage?

While per capita consumption of water is ever increasing annually, our management of water resources are hitting record low. We tend to be the cowards in water resources management. We use a water body and once it is polluted, we abandon it and run to another. This is a common modus operandi of Malaysian authorities. Such behaviour kills the life in the river, lakes, groundwater and other water resources. Destruction of water bodies is equally rampant in states such as Pahang, Kelantan and Sarawak but it does not discount other states. Man and nature must live in equilibrium to ensure there is continuity and sustainability. When we take more from the nature, we are indirectly plotting disasters to

ourselves. Droughts, deforestation, flood, landslide and many more such disasters are part and parcel of our own creation and please do not blame the GLOBAL WARMING. We must keep in mind an important lesson, in nature, everything is limited and we should learn our limits!

Do State Governments cooperate in raw water management?

Water has no identity nor chooses a particular affiliation. It flows freely. How many state governments in Malaysia actually cooperate to ensure the water resources are protected? If pollution control in one border is neglected, the neighbouring state has to fork out more cost to treat the water for drinking purposes. Are humans on the other side of the border less important? Can we not share responsibilities to live side by side sustainably?

Do Federal and State Governments Cooperate to ensure Water Security in Malaysia?

Thank God, water is not a member of any political party. It is neutral in politics as well as chemical characteristics. However, when you dilute other chemical in water, you start to change its characteristics. This is the similar situation when water services industry restructuring in Selangor and few other states are politicised. In addition to that, continuous and clean water supply problem in Sabah and Sarawak is a serious issue. Restructuring water services in Sabah and Sarawak is seen as Federal Government removing state government's power. Fortunately, all the peninsular states that have restructured still have their power and in long run will benefit the public and businesses. Why such benefits are being denied to Sarawakians and Sabahans, they are my fellow Malaysians as well? Drinking water from rainwater harvesting systems has their own negative repercussions if cleanliness is jeopardised.

Can we cooperate or it is too late?

Water is a national security issue. The cooperation starts from local governments, businesses, public, state governments and federal government. It varies in implementation such as pollution prevention, protection of water catchment, ensuring continuous supply of treated water, water for irrigation and industry, etc. However, we can cooperate. Put aside political differences and personal agenda. A cohesive cooperation will only result better outputs that will place Malaysia in international arena. If 9 different countries with different political affiliation can cooperate to bring life to Rhine River in Europe, I am confident that 13 states and 3 federal territories in Malaysia can deliver a better example. Priority is to gazette all water catchment areas are permanent reserve by year 2015. This is a deadline fixed by AWER for all state governments. Perhaps something that can be pondered by future assemblymen. Failure to do so, we will moot for a public referendum to remove the power to water resources from state government and place under Parliament.

What will be the result of failure to cooperate?

It is simply suffering, food crisis, social unrest and we can kiss good bye to developed nation status for Malaysia. Water security is a prerequisite for development and we are far away from achieving it. Malaysians will be electing future leaders of this nation, ensure they have what it takes to protect the nation's water needs.

When you are THIRSTY, the nature is THIRSTY too. Think about this every time you turn on your tap.

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